Pedagogical leadership of early childhood administrators in implementing quality rating and improvement systems

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Abstract

Early childhood educational quality relies on state regulations. One method states have begun using to improve quality are called quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). These voluntary systems along with increased standards for classroom practice as well as staff educational requirements have been implemented in many states to varying degrees. In addition to improving the quality of early childhood educational programs are also used to communicate quality to teachers and families.

Using a policy analysis framework to identify the differences in QRIS programs, a sample of five states that represented the range of current quality standards used in the analysis. QRIS policy and supporting materials for Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Massachusetts were analyzed for similarities and differences in the breadth and depth of their quality expectations. Additionally, they were analyzed to identify the varying implicit and explicit expectations for administrators within the QRIS policy.

In childcare centers the administrators are inherently responsible for understanding and implementing program quality standards. In order to understand and implement high quality programs, administrators need pedagogical leadership skills in order to implement appropriate program policies and support classroom teachers. These skills and positions contribute to overall program quality. This study found there are noticeable differences in the breadth and depth of quality across the states studied. There are differences in the stated expectations, amount of expectations, and level of training required to improve quality; differences in implicit and explicit expectations for administrators within the QRIS policy. Additionally, there were noticeable differences in training requirements and the amount of explicitly stated responsibility for administrators in center based programs.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Across the United States 55% of preschoolers attend childcare centers (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2019). Child care programs are intended to supplement the learning and care a child receives from their home (Morrison, 2012). Children enrolled in childcare show improved long term developmental outcomes and school readiness when enrolled in a high quality program (Hestenes et al., 2015). Quality childcare provides opportunities for a child's cognitive growth and thus builds a foundation for future learning (Zero To Three, 2017).

When children have access to quality childcare it improves their developmental and educational outcomes. Many states developed Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to ensure high quality programs (Hestenes et al., 2015; Kirby, Caronongan, Malone, & Boller, 2015). These systems are in place to communicate quality to directors, teachers, and families. The need for QRIS systems rose out of a need for accountability and increased quality to improve child outcomes (Boller et al., 2015). QRIS goals are accomplished through identified criteria and expectations for programs. Directors play a pivotal role in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs and their education, experience, and training directly influence the program (Tout, Epstein, Soli, & Lowe, 2015).

The following study used document analysis to evaluate state QRIS policies and examined expectations for pedagogical leadership. Leaders are responsible for making sense of and translating policy into organizational actions that accomplish policy intent (Cardno, 2018). To make sense of policy, leaders must understand the role of policy and how it works toward quality improvement, in this case. Policy impacts every person in an organization, implicitly or explicitly, and leaders play a role in interpreting and facilitating policy demands and policy

context. Policy context, text, and consequences are examined to inform educational leaders. Policy document analysis is used as a research tool to examine policy for both what is written and intended (Cardno, 2018). Policy context is the background forces and goals behind writing the policy. Policy text is what is explicitly stated within the materials. Policy consequences are how the policy expectations are interpreted and implemented.

As previously stated, the policy context of goals for QRIS included raising quality standards for childcare as well as informing professionals and families of the quality of care provided. While important, the stated goals for the individual state QRIS policies are beyond the scope of this paper and will not be examined further. Statewide policy documents as well as state facilitated websites and materials will be analyzed as policy text. Policy text, policy content, and policy consequences were all used to analyze the policy text and supporting materials (Cardno, 2018). Explicit and implicit inferences were made to distinguish what is being said in policy and what is inferred from the policy. These explicit and implicit policy components have direct impacts on administrators and how to analyze and execute policy expectations within their organization. "The role of organizational leaders involves making sense of policy and translating policy demands into practical actions that can be applied to achieve policy values" (Cardno, 2018, p. 624). Administrators are responsible for program policies and alignment with policy (Cardno, 2018), so they play a pivotal role in the quality of the program (Arroyo, 2015). Through their knowledge of the goals of policy initiatives, administrators implement program activities to align the program and other staff members to achieve policy values (Cardno, 2018). Content and document analysis of specific QRIS policies will provide administrators with information to increase their knowledge of the goals of the initiatives which will improve their ability to execute program policies aligned with standards.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

The following review will discuss early childhood educational quality and how States are managing levels of quality. There are different types and measures for quality in early childhood programs. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) have been created at the state level to identify a consistent classification of early childhood educational quality for that state. In childcare centers administrators are responsible for implementing state policy as well as creating a policy for their center. Depending on the state, administrators have different levels of expectation and training from their states and this will impact the quality of their program. Administrators implementing high levels of quality have the pedagogical leadership skills to understand state policy as well as convey and train their staff to implement QRIS requirements in a developmentally appropriate way.

Quality in Early Childhood Settings

Structural and process quality are the two categories typically used to describe quality in early childhood settings. Structural quality includes the diversity of materials, level of staff education, and use of resources (Connors, 2016). Process quality includes the type of interactions, relationships, and social processes taking place in the classroom and program (Connors & Morris, 2015; Pelatti, Dynia, Logan, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2016). Connors and Morris (2015) introduced program and classroom quality as two levels to structural and process quality. Program level quality includes the elements of a program directly related to the teachers' learning environment. Classroom level quality is the components of the program directly related to the child's learning environment. These levels and types of quality affect classrooms differently and with varied impacts on development. Table 1 shows examples of the different types and levels of quality and how they are related.

Table 1 Different Quality Types

	Structural Quality	Process Quality
Program Quality	Program Policies Administrator Qualifications	Staff Culture Staff and Administrator Relationship
Classroom Quality	Organization of Materials Education of Staff	Teacher and Child Interactions Classroom Relationships

Process quality in the classroom is linked to process quality within the program (Connors, 2016). When teachers are supported in their professional environment, their interactions within the classroom will be improved. "Structural features of quality provide an important foundation for high-quality processes in ECE classrooms" (Connors, 2016, p. 34). Overall, structural quality benefits children through process quality (Connors, 2016; Cryer, 1999; Lin & Magnuson, 2018). Although structural quality was linked to positive outcomes for children it is not enough to achieve those outcomes exclusively (Connors & Morris, 2015). Pedagogical leaders influence process quality, and a leader's ability to execute pedagogical leadership is critical to a high-quality learning environment and positive child outcomes.

Key responsibilities of the administrator in implementing high levels of program level process quality are to ensure their program is meeting or exceeding expectations (Connors, 2016). One way for administrators to ensure high program process quality is encouraging and participating in a supportive staff culture. "Ongoing processes or cultures of learning within the professional environment of ECE programs are likely critical mechanisms of change between policy intervention and desirable classroom and child level outcomes" (Connors, 2016, p. 38). For these administrative procedures to be effective, the culture should be collaborative, founded

in practice (Yazejian & Iruka, 2015), and focused on continual program improvement (Connors, 2016). Effective leaders ensure high-quality teaching and a culture of learning by producing internal policies that encourage collaboration, support, and growth (Connors, 2016). If a program is not currently supporting this model, leaders can modify, adapt, or change current policies. Internal policies are responsible for the current organizational culture which can create an environment for growth (Zinsser et al., 2016). Effective administrators foster and support that environment through policies.

There are some environments that foster program process quality of collaboration and growth (Connors, 2016). High-quality, professional learning environments must reflect warmth, respect, teamwork, support, and partnership. Teachers should also feel valued, encouraged, and supported within their program. Children in the classroom are viewed as learners who need support and teachers within a program are to be viewed the same way, as adult learners who need support. In a previous study, teachers expressed their desire to have acknowledgement from individuals in leadership that they need an environment of mentoring and support (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). Overall, teachers are more effective when they feel part of a broader program community so they feel comfortable reaching out for and receiving support (Connors, 2016).

Teachers will benefit from a culture of support and continuous improvement with ongoing professional development (Boller et al., 2015; Connors, 2016; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015). When there are instructional changes in the classroom, teachers will be more likely to adapt to the change. Teachers will also be happier, see more success within their classroom and they will stay in the program longer. This decreases staff turnover. To observe these results in a program, there must be administrative supports in place with the purpose of development and learning. An

effective administrator mentors and coaches their staff to ensure high-quality teaching is occurring, and a relationship is built with those staff members.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) are a strategy used by states to understand, assess, and improve early childhood programs (Hestenes et al., 2015; Kirby et al., 2015). These systems create increased accountability for programs in a time focused on reducing learning gaps caused by a family's socioeconomic status (Boller et al. 2015). This accountability and quality standard can improve a child's developmental and educational outcomes across childcare programs. One goal is communicating a program's level of quality to parents in a consistent system (Hestenes et al., 2015). However, states define their own quality standards based on their situation, goals, and values, so consistent communication of quality varies by state (Boller et al. 2015).

Individual states across the United States are working to improve the cognitive abilities and school readiness of the children through their implementation and refinement of their individual QRIS systems (Boller et al., 2015; Connors & Morris, 2015; Kirby et al., 2015). According to Child Care Aware of America (2015) only 38 states have fully implemented QRIS programs. The requirements, components, uses, and validity vary from state to state. QRIS programs are effective tools in identifying differences in environments, interactions, and activities in early childhood programs (Tout et al., 2017). For example, in North Carolina the QRIS system is used as their licensing system and all programs are expected to participate (Hestenes et al., 2015). Other states have voluntary participation and enrollment with funding and reimbursement for participation and overall scores (Connors & Morris, 2015).

There are five common components of QRIS systems in the United States: standards of quality, accountability, support, funding, and family education. Standards of quality are used to determine program ratings for the requirements of teacher qualifications and program characteristics (Boller et al., 2015; Hestenes et al., 2015). These standards have been identified through national guidelines and formalized assessment. Accountability measures are used to ensure state regulation compliance. When the QRIS system is not part of the licensing regulation, the QRIS rating must include and account for the existing state standards. Supports are used to improve quality through coaching and grants (Boller et al., 2015). When the rating reveals gaps or shortfalls for a program, there are resources to follow up with coaching procedures to train, support, and ensure quality improvement in the program. Funding and or financial incentives are used to encourage participation and allow for necessary outside support in QRIS programs. Programs will be better able to participate or follow through with the suggestions when they have the means and information to improve their program. For example, in 2014 the Child Care and Development Block Grant included provisions for states to invest in quality improvement activities (Child Care Aware of America, 2015). Family education is essential to quality in the classroom due to the parents having individual choices and goals for their child (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This means the family should be further educated and included in the child's learning with their child's teachers through family partnerships (Boller et al., 2015).

Previous study quality groupings. Connors and Morris (2015) used their analysis of structural and process quality to categorize all the quality improvement initiatives in the United States into six groups. Each group builds on the one before and ranges from one, as the lowest quality, to six as the highest. The first group contains states with no statewide Quality Rating

and Improvement Systems (QRIS). The second has a QRIS system but it is limited and is below average for measures of quality. The third are the states that have implemented a QRIS system but have average expectations for all measures of quality. The fourth, the QRIS systems have measures of quality focused on classroom structure. The fifth, QRIS has a focus on structural and process quality. Sixth, QRIS systems are integrated into the licensing systems and have measures for process and structural quality. All the states across the country fall into one of these categories.

Program quality is driven by effective administrators and leadership. Informed leaders are more equipped to choose and support appropriate curricula, encourage staff development, and form partnerships. Leaders are responsible for choosing and supporting the implementation of curriculum as well as using rating scales to monitor the quality of the program.

Implementing curriculum. QRIS programs require programs to choose curriculum informed by data and to train their staff about appropriate uses of the chosen curriculum. The administrator is responsible for choosing and/or implementing curricula appropriately. The National Center on Early Childhood Assurance identified three common curricula used in QRIS systems (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2017). Eighty-three percent of QRIS programs incorporate curriculum use into their indicators for centers (The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017). In 2016, twenty-two percent of QRIS programs were using the High Scope Preschool curriculum (HighScope, 2019; The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017). This curriculum is play based, child-centered, and evidence based. It identifies learning objectives, adult interaction strategies, and assessment tools. The main focus is on active learning and the child learning through play. Creative Curriculum is another curriculum used. It is research based and focuses on discovery as a mode of learning (Teaching Strategies, 2017). In

2016, twenty-four percent of QRIS programs were using Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers (The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017). It incorporates teachers' understanding of best practice, project-based learning, and child centered teaching. Forty-four percent of QRIS programs use assessment results to inform curriculum implementation and thirty-two percent require training about curriculum (The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017).

Curricula can enhance the quality of a program if it is intentionally implemented in the care setting (*Implementing a Curriculum in Child Care Programs*, 2012). Classroom staff should be empowered and supported through the curriculum for their classroom teaching. Administrators best support teachers' implementation when they know the classrooms and are observing in the classroom regularly. Effective administrator support to classroom teachers is seen in collaborative decision making as well as regular coaching and feedback.

Rating scales. Many states and programs use external measures of quality and the results from those are used to provide QRIS scores (Kirby et al., 2015). QRIS systems vary from state to state but many use the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Boller et al., 2015; Hestenes et al., 2015; Lahti et al., 2015; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015; Zellman & Karoly, 2015). The ECERS-R and the ITERS-R follow a set of standards and use a block scoring system to identify levels of quality within a classroom. Another rating scale commonly seen in QRIS measures is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Lahti et al., 2015; Zellman & Karoly, 2015) and it measures the quality of teacher-child interactions within the classroom. In a seven state study, five of the seven states showed a significant association with QRIS level and CLASS Pre-K Instructional Support (Tout et al., 2017).

Interaction scales are used in order to provide feedback and improve classroom quality. Teacher child interactions are a foundational part of high quality learning environments (Early, Maxwell, Ponder, & Pan, 2017). These interactions can be categorized into emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Emotionally supportive and responsive teachers will see improved classroom interactions through behavior management and learning experiences. Classroom organization is part of the environment, and environment ratings are an indicator of quality (Karoly et al., 2013). According to the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, there are six components in an environment: space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and literacy, learning activities, integration, and program structure (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2018). Lastly, instructional support comes in the form of the director supporting teaching and learning through a climate of growth and support (Abel, 2016). These three components work together to form a high-quality learning environment for young children.

Administrator training and support within QRIS. Most staff development strategies include teacher feedback after observing classroom interactions or about their QRIS scores (Zellman & Karoly, 2015). The most popular form of feedback is the coaching model (Boller et al., 2015; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015). Coaching models that emphasize domain specific curriculum and performance feedback are most beneficial (Boller et al., 2015). Another useful support strategy is financial support and incentives to support programs in funding improvements and training strategies (Hestenes et al., 2015; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015).

Effective leaders have a disposition which empowers teachers to discover their role in implementing the philosophy of the program (Pacchiano et al., 2018). In a trusting environment, teachers follow the leader's vision and use it to impact their personal teaching and learning. This vision becomes the program goal and all the teachers are invested as if it were their own.

Effective leaders consider the outside influences affecting children within the facility when implementing a vision (Zinsser et al., 2016). Classroom teachers are searching to improve their skills as professionals through feedback and coaching (Akers et al., 2014; Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). To further support teachers with this knowledge, successful leaders implement structural characteristics of policies and resources, interpersonal features, and teacher relationships. This aims for improved organizational performance and achievement from the leadership perspective (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

Teachers with greater levels of training are better equipped to understand their role in evaluating the quality of their teaching (Ho, 2010). Employees gain greater understanding of child development and appreciate when the training is based on feedback about their personal strengths and weaknesses in the classroom (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). Exceptional leaders give real time feedback and demonstrate skills in the classroom (Boller et al., 2015; Finkelstein, 2018; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015; Zellman & Karoly, 2015). These experiences in the classroom provide leaders with well-timed, appropriate staff development opportunities (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). When teachers are receiving training targeted at them, they feel understood by their administrator. This training can effectively target curricula implementation and teaching strategies.

Program Leadership

Whole leadership model. Whole leadership is a model that encompasses three components necessary for a successful leader or leadership team (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). The three interwoven categories are leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership. Since these factors overlap and work together when one type of leadership is used, it impacts or elicits action from the other areas. Leadership essentials,

administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership are an interactive process through which early childhood facilities are run.

Leadership essentials are foundational skills within a leader such as reflective practice, communication, and relationship building (Abel et al., 2017) which influence the development of the administrative and pedagogical skills. Successful leaders possess these essential skills and use them as motivators and anchors to build and improve their other leadership abilities. Administrative leaders focus on program wide goal setting, advocacy for children and families, coordination of staff, and collaborate with communities. When administrators know the staff on a classroom level, they will be better equipped to hire complementary staff to improve the work climate. When leaders are available and present in the classroom, they will form bonds with the children in their care, so they can better make curriculum and program policy decisions (Coleman, Sharp & Handscomb, 2016).

Pedagogical leadership. Pedagogical leaders aim to address the complexities of teaching and learning (Abel et al., 2017), through engaging in processes that shape organizations through the external standards and expected child outcomes (Male & Palaiologou, 2015). These processes are executed through classroom practice, relationships with families, and application and collection of data (Abel et al., 2017). Classroom teachers should be supported both directly and indirectly through the execution of curriculum. For example, leaders should provide the materials necessary to implement the curriculum, but they should also be in the classroom with teachers modeling developmentally appropriate practices. This will also teach how best to implement the curriculum with the children in each class. When leaders are spending time in the classroom, they will have opportunities to form personal relationships with families. This

modeling of relationship building will encourage the same from classroom teachers as well as set an expectation.

In a study of Singapore, Japan, and Finland, directors spent 12-23% of their time engaging in pedagogical leadership (Hujala et al., 2016). Directors in Finland and Singapore had the highest percentages of time spent on pedagogical leadership. When asked what areas were important to them, directors in Finland said pedagogical leadership was slightly more important than the time they were allocating, but leaders in Singapore and Japan found pedagogical leadership over 10% more important than the time they were currently dedicating. Pedagogical leadership was identified as the most important leadership task in every country.

Pedagogical leadership encompasses classroom practice, family engagement, and data utilization (Abel et al., 2017). Classroom practice is an administrators' presence and support evaluating classrooms. Family engagement is a continuous partnership developed between a child's family, care provider, and community (Child Care Aware of America, 2015). Family engagement focuses on parent contribution to a child's success (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Sabol, Sommer, Sanchez, & Busby, 2018). Data utilization is a leaders ability to analyze data to gain new knowledge and apply it to practice with staff, children, and families (Guss, Sweet-Darter, Mangus, & Stein, 2015). Leaders incorporate their pedagogical knowledge with content knowledge to interpret data for program and classroom improvements. All three create the philosophy of pedagogical leadership, but the following will elaborate on classroom practice only.

Classroom practice. Successful leaders should appraise and evaluate classrooms and environments. This is done in a culturally sensitive way where leaders and teachers have the same goals of educating children and approach it from a culturally appropriate lens (Hujala et al.,

2016). Cultural sensitivity also plans for and manages change in the classroom culture, employee culture, or outside expectations (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). The same goal of educating children is executed differently based on their cultural context (Hujala et al., 2016). Leaders evaluate classroom functioning and data to identify if teachers need further support (Coleman, Sharp, & Handscomb, 2016). Classroom evaluation is done continually through open communication and leaders spending time interacting in classrooms with children and teachers.

Early childhood programs are growth mindset organizations that rely on development and learning simultaneously (Abel, 2016). Pedagogical leaders participate in a shared philosophy with employees and work together to shape its construction and execution (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). "Leaders empower teachers and families to embrace the important roles they have in making the vision for the program a reality" (Pacchiano, Wagner, & Lewandowski, 2018, p. 8). This clear vision applies to the goals of pedagogy and curriculum, contributing to a higher quality program (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Some ways leaders encourage this philosophy is through open communication and collaborative working (Coleman et al., 2016). When a leader encourages participation from all employees and has established lines of communication there will be a mutual understanding and execution of the philosophy. This teamwork and communication will lead to high quality classroom practices. Teachers can provide different perspectives of classroom practices, and varied perspectives can improve organizational development from staff to leaders (Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala, 2016). Effective leaders are the first step to organizational change and improvement (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013) and a pedagogical leaders incorporate evidence based practices for a higher quality facility (Bloom & Abel, 2015).

Research Questions

The literature suggests QRIS policy varies across states. It was also noted there are a wide variety of components that could be included as quality measures such as Environmental Rating Scales, social interaction scales, or teacher qualifications (Boller et al., 2015; Hestenes et al., 2015; Lahti et al., 2015; Yazejian & Iruka, 2015; Zellman & Karoly, 2015). Beyond the requirements stated in QRIS in childcare centers the administrator is responsible for implementing pedagogical leadership in order to ensure high quality learning environments (Abel et al., 2017). The literature suggests states are varied in their requirements, and the following questions will address possible differences.

1. According to the classroom practice component of pedagogical leadership, is there variability in the breadth and depth of criteria in QRIS policy based on differences of structural and process quality?
2. Are there differing explicit and implicit expectations for directors in QRIS policy across the classroom practice component of pedagogical leadership?

Chapter 3 - Methods

QRIS programs have been changing how early childhood programs are evaluated and licensed for two decades (Hestenes et al., 2015). These programs are varied across states in their depth and requirements; however, they consistently assess quality within classrooms. The following study analyzed the differences between state systems, and the implicit and explicit expectations those requirements placed on program administrators.

Sample

The data originated from the QRIS Compendium that is updated yearly, and the following analyses used data from 2017 (The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017). The QRIS Compendium is data divided by states, and only states with statewide QRIS systems were analyzed and five of the available states were used in the sample. Connors and Morris (2015) empirically grouped the states into six categories based on the states' development and implementation of QRIS programs. The groupings were identified by a cluster analysis with criteria rated on a QRIS scoring and policy index. One state from five of the six groups was used in this study to identify the frequency of policy criteria within states and across the groups. The first group contained states with no QRIS policy in place, so it was not used in the following analysis. Second, QRIS programs with few requirements under each of the categories and fall below the mean of program scores. Third, programs with few requirements but one standard deviation above the mean. Fourth, many requirements focused on classroom structure and few on classroom process. Fifth, requirements focused on classroom process with some about classroom structure. Sixth, the requirements are focused on classroom process and structure, and the QRIS system is integrated into the licensing system. The following analysis used clusters

two through six. Table 2 outlines the states used in the study and the titles on the table were generated from the way the groups were made in the Connors and Morris (2015) study.

Table 2

States Included in Analysis by QRIS Quality Clusters

Limited QRIS	No Focus	Classroom Structure Focus	Classroom Process Focus	Classroom/Program Process Focus
Illinois	Kentucky	New Mexico	Minnesota	Massachusetts

Procedure

The first step in this study was to access information about the five sample states from the 2017 Quality Compendium (https://qualitycompendium.org/) operated by the Build Initiative. The QRIS Compendium is an accessible online database that regularly updates information about the QRIS initiatives operating throughout the United States. Information in the Quality Compendium is organized into 14 categories with data for this project coming from the Program Information and Indicators for Child Care Centers categories. Child Care Center categories were chosen because this data included childcare centers and preschoolers ages 3-5. The QRIS data collection tool was used to note QRIS program goals along with descriptive information about the state QRIS such as QRIS name from the Program Information category. Criteria from the Indicators for Child Care Centers categories related to one component of pedagogical leadership, classroom practice (See Table 3). Next, the state website with the entire policy was used to identify specific information about the requirements, such as specific assessments or learning centers. The second level of analysis was used to confirm or identify specific QRIS requirements as the QRIS compendium often uses generic examples for clarity of the

requirement. For example, the Oklahoma QRIS Compendium information notes in the Family Partnership and Engagement Indicators section that the QRIS requires a Strengthening Families Checklist. When reviewing the policy there is no such requirement. The two-level screening process increased the accuracy of information and reliability of the QRIS data collection tool (Complete tool in Appendix A).

Table 3

Pedagogical Leadership Indicators

Classroom Practice
Features of Professional Development Indicators
Features of Program Administration
Features of Environment and Interaction Indicators
QRIS Participation by Program Type
Training for Observers
Features of Curriculum Indicators
Curriculum Identified for Preschoolers
Features of Teacher Support Indicators
Leadership Indicators
Observational Tools Used
Features of Child Assessment Indicators
Features of Continuous Quality Improvement Indicators

Analysis Plan

The QRIS data collection tool was used for a frequency and thematic analysis. The tool has checkboxes that indicate if certain criteria are present in the policy and places to note specific information. These checkboxes were used for the frequency analysis to look for themes and patterns in the policy and supporting documents across states. The criteria and indicators were also analyzed for an identification of the breadth and depth of the state QRIS. In each section there is a space for implicit and explicit roles for the director used for the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis used the notes on implicit and explicit roles to look for similarities across and within Connors and Morris (2015) state categories.

Chapter 4 - Results

The following analysis was conducted using two data sources: state policy and supporting materials from state websites. Many of the policy and supporting materials mention meeting licensing requirements, so those were also researched and are used in the following analysis. Each section is divided into categories. The first shows the breadth and depth of each state and the second a comparison across the states. Following each comparison is a discussion of the implicit and explicit expectations of the administrator as it relates to each category.

Classroom Practice

Organization of environment and learning. The organization of the classroom and materials are, "[S]tructural features of quality that provide an important foundation for high-quality processes in early childhood education classrooms" (Connors, 2016, p. 34). These structural features are directly linked to the child's learning environment and have the ability to impact their development. The type, availability, amount, and location of appropriate materials are the components of the learning environment (Connors & Morris, 2015). A developmentally appropriate learning environment includes a socially and culturally responsive atmosphere to the context in which the child lives (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). "Culture is a concept that connects shared values, meaning, and interpretations of behaviors" (Hujala et al., 2016, p. 411). Incorporating the needs of families into classrooms can improve the quality of the learning environment. Best practice is based on how children learn and develop and is appropriate to their age and developmental ability (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Table 4 shows different components of the organization of environment and learning individual states require.

Table 4

Organization of Environment and Learning Requirements by State

Criteria	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
Environmental Rating Scales	X	X	X	X	X
Classroom Transitions	X		X		
Cultural Awareness and Inclusion	X	X	X	X	X
Administrator: Training on Environmental Rating Scales	X				
Staff Training Environmental Rating Scales	X			X	
Administrator Training on Transition Strategies	X				
Administrator Training on Inclusion	X				

of Children with Special Needs				
Staff Training Inclusion of Children with Special Needs	X		X	
Staff: Training on Cultural Inclusion	X		X	X

Every state has a requirement for environmental rating scales (ECERS-R, ITERS-R) and this includes expectations for room arrangement, schedule, materials, and interactions. Minnesota requires daily transitions to be brief and used to extend learning experiences as a three or four star requirement. The classroom environment is expected to be challenging and organized and the experiences are meant to enhance purposeful play, social interaction, exploration and skill development (Parent Aware Quality Rating and Improvement System: Standards and Indicators, 2016). New Mexico specifically requires effective literacy instruction through small and large group literacy opportunities, and they are measured using the New Mexico Early Literacy Observation Checklist (FOCUS, nd). They are to document phonological awareness activities, oral language and vocabulary activities, concepts of print activities, read alouds that incorporate comprehension strategies, and opportunities for developmentally appropriate writing activities. New Mexico is the only state to specifically mention a content area and expectations for fulfillment beyond the implied expectations from rating scales.

Every state mentions cultural inclusion but Minnesota has their own Parent Aware Environment Self-Assessment checklist used to evaluate classroom environments and cultural responsiveness (Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators, 2016). New Mexico expects the

program, classroom, and materials to reflect the children and families being served (FOCUS, nd). Massachusetts requires materials reflect the language and culture of children in the classroom and their community (MA Quality Rating and Improvement System, 2016). They also expect a written policy about the awareness and respect for differences among children and families and the program is responsive to the inclusion of a variety of learning needs.

There are two different types of transitions mentioned in QRIS programs. Minnesota and Illinois are the only states to require transition plans for children moving between classrooms or to Kindergarten (Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators, 2016; ExceleRate Illinois, 2019). Both states require programs to communicate with families, provide resources to the community, and prepare the parent for the next step within or outside the program. Illinois also requires daily transitions to be short and opportunities for learning (ExceleRate Illinois, 2019). It is are the only state to mention daily transitions in any part of the QRIS requirement.

New Mexico requires programs use the Inclusive Practices Checklist to develop a strategy and timeline toward a more inclusive setting (FOCUS, nd). All five states mention inclusion but only three mention training to improve inclusive environments. Additionally, only two of those states specifically required the administrator to have training on inclusive environments and teaching.

Explicit expectations for the administrator lie in the required training for the administrator. Requirements for certain scores on environmental rating scales, communication with families, or cultural awareness are implicitly expected. In order to achieve certain scores on an environmental rating scale, administrators need to ensure availability of required materials and teacher's compliance and understanding of rating is implicitly implied. Communication with families relates to their child transitioning and incorporating their culture and needs into the

classroom and the administrator is responsible for maintaining an environment of collaboration. Administrators must hire teachers who see value in family communication and engagement, support cultural inclusion through policies and documents, and support teachers through the processes.

Teacher and child interactions. Both the materials provided and their organization have the ability to positively influence social processes within the classroom (Connors & Morris 2015). These social processes within a classroom are critical to classroom relationships (Connors 2016) which can result in higher learning self-efficacy (Hestenes et al. 2015). Teacher's responses to children in their classroom provide emotional support for children, which results in a high quality learning environment (Pelatti et al., 2016). Process quality includes interactions, relationships, and social processes taking place in the classroom and is a foundational factor in high-quality learning environments (Connors & Morris 2015; Pelatti et al., 2016). Table 5 presents the differences in teacher child interaction expectations across the five states studied.

Table 5

Teacher and Child Interaction Requirements by State

Features of State Policy and Materials	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
CLASS	X		X		X
Caregiver Interaction Scale					X
Administrator: CLASS Training	X				X*
Staff: CLASS Training	X				X*

Note. The asterisk (*) indicates a requirement for formal professional development on how to support positive relationships and interactions but does not specifically say CLASS training.

Minnesota requires programs use the CLASS and are awarded points in QRIS based on emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support scores (Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators, 2016). The learning environment is expected to be organized and challenging, while the interactions are expected to be warm. These interactions and measures are required but no training is specifically required in Minnesota. This is the only state to require a teacher and child interaction tool without adding a training requirement. Massachusetts is the only state to require a scale outside the CLASS and instead require broad training on social interactions. The other states require training on the CLASS exclusively or no training or measurement.

Explicitly, the administrator is required to train on the CLASS or supporting positive interactions in two states, Illinois and Massachusetts. Additionally, the administrator would be implicitly responsible for supporting classroom staff in implementation and quality improvement based on the results. In Kentucky and New Mexico there are no requirements in this area so it implicitly falls on the administrator to use their pedagogical leadership to ensure developmentally appropriate practice and supportive teacher and child interactions in the classroom.

Curriculum and assessment informing curriculum. Intentionally implemented curricula can enhance the quality of an early childhood setting (Anon, 2012). Using evidence from curriculum and evaluating teaching effectiveness will form a foundation for decision making in early learning environments (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This curriculum evidence can be viewed as data to be used to develop new knowledge and apply it to practice with children (Guss et al., 2015). Successful integration of data and classroom planning is best accomplished when data is viewed as a learning opportunity. Curriculum is based on what is known about children's development as well as the interrelationships and sequences of ideas, so children's abilities and knowledge development can be fostered through skills already acquired (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The use of data alongside curriculum will support the whole child in the classroom, providing a high-quality learning environment. Table 6 shows the differences across states in these curriculum and informed curriculum planning requirements by states.

Table 6

Curriculum and Assessment Informing Curriculum Requirements by State

Features of State Policy and Materials	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
Lesson Plans		X	X		
Curriculum	X	X	X	X	X
Early Learning Guidelines	X	X	X	X	X
Use Assessment in Planning	X	X	X	X	X
Staff: Training on Curriculum	X	X			X
Administrator: Training on Curriculum	X				

Minnesota requires assessment to be used for individual and group instruction (Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators, 2016). Massachusetts requires data gathered through screening tools and formal and informal assessment to inform curriculum planning and program decision making (MA QRIS, 2016). The program decision making includes curriculum content, strategies for improved implementation, and professional development. These child assessments are required to include parent input at least three times per year.

Illinois is the only state which specifically requires administrator training on curriculum. Kentucky requires staff training on curriculum but does not say formal professional development. Massachusetts requires staff have formal professional development on curriculum. Within these different levels of required training, all states still require curriculum to be tied to early learning guidelines and assessment to inform planning.

States with minimal or missing training expectations while requiring use of curriculum, assessment, and integration of guidelines place implicit expectations on the administrator. The administrator is assuming responsibility of the program fulfilling the requirement of the appropriate use of tools as well as training the staff. Since it is implicit, this training could come in the form of outside professional help, funding for training, or train staff personally. In the states that do not require lesson plans, it is implicit on the administrator to ensure curriculum implementation as well as alignment with early learning guidelines and individualized teaching.

Assessment. Assessment data can be used to gain insight into the organizational climate that leads to successful outcomes (McCormick Center 2019). Formal and informal assessment strategies can be used to communicate child development to parents, evaluate teaching, and improve child outcomes (Guss et al., 2015). Developmentally appropriate practice focuses on setting goals and experiences suited to a child's learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2015). These goals and knowledge can be developed through formal and informal assessment strategies. Table 7 shows the differences in assessment and training across the five states studied.

Table 7

Assessment Requirements by State

Features of State Policy and Materials	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
Screening and Assessment Tools	X	X	X	X	X
Staff: Training Developmental Screening	X	X			X
Administrator: Training on Assessment Tools	X				
Staff: Training on Assessment Tools	X				
Administrator: Training on Screening Tools	X				X

Minnesota does not require screenings but does have regular assessment and parent involvement standards based on QRIS level (Parent Aware QRIS: Standards and Indicators, 2016). There is no training requirement for conducting these assessments or communicating the results. Many states do not have training requirements for assessment or screening but all mention screening and assessment requirements. Illinois is the only state requiring both using assessments and training staff and administrators on how to use and communicate data collected.

The implicit expectations for the administrator are similar to the section above. There is a requirement to use screening, assessment or both in every state. Only Illinois and Massachusetts require training in all the areas, Kentucky requires it for staff screenings. In all areas where training is not required, the administrator is responsible for ensuring the staff know how to use the tools and integrate the results into practice. Screening results may need to be shared with families, and the administrator is responsible for ensuring completion, communication, and understanding of results.

Administrator and Staff Qualifications

After looking at the specific expectations of classroom practice and the required skills it is necessary to look at the qualifications of professionals training and practicing within these programs. Administrators play a critical role in the quality of their early childhood program through their education, experience, and training (Tout et al., 2015). The administrator influences all levels of the organization with their knowledge and perspective (Abel et al., 2017). This results in the qualifications of the administrator directly influencing the administrator's ability to support staff and children within their program. Teachers with better levels of training are more equipped to understand their role in evaluating their teaching (Ho, 2010). Lead teachers are becoming more responsible for leading curriculum and solving complicated classroom problems. Through ongoing professional development and qualifications, they will be more equipped to solve these problems. Table 8 shows different requirements of staff and administrator qualifications by state. Table 9 shows additional training required during employment for professional development or program management.

Table 8

Administrator and Staff Requirements by State

Features of State Policy and Materials	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
Staff: High School Diploma or GED	X	X	X		X
Administrator: High School Diploma or GED	X	X	X		X
Administrator: Program Administrator Credential or Training	X	X	X	X	X
Staff: State Credential	X		X		X
Administrator: Experience in Early Childhood Setting				X	X
Staff: Experience in Early Childhood Setting	X		X	X	X
Administrator: Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood or Related Field			X	X	X
Staff: Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood or Related Field			X		X

Administrator: Career Lattice Involvement		X	X		
Staff: Career Lattice Involvement		X	X		
Administrator: Experience Supervising Staff			X		
Administrator: College Credits in Early Childhood or Related Field			X	X	X
Staff: College Credits in Early Childhood or Related Field	X		X	X	X

Note. These qualifications are not all required for a person in the position, some are substitutes for others and some are required for different levels of QRIS.

Table 9

Administrator and Staff Training Program and Personal Development Requirements by State

Features of State Policy and Materials	States				
	Illinois	Kentucky	Minnesota	New Mexico	Massachusetts
Administrator: Quality Improvement Planning Training	X	X*		X*	
Administrator: Trained on Professional Development Plan		X*	X*		X
Staff: Trained on Developing Professional Development Plan	X	X*			X*
Administrator: Training on QRIS Program				X	
Staff: Training on QRIS Program				X	
Administrator: Trained on Program Administrator Scale	X				X*

Note. The asterisk (*) indicates the required use of the tool or strategy but never mentions training with the tool or strategy.

Tables 8 and 9 above highlight the differences between the states when it comes to requirements and training to work in a classroom or lead a facility. In four states a high school diploma or an equivalent degree is required to be a lead teacher or administrator. New Mexico, Minnesota, and Massachusetts do have a requirement for college courses in an Early Childhood field for administrators. However, in all five states there is, at some level, a requirement for administrators to complete some administrator training or have an administration credential. Massachusetts is the only state which specifically requires administrators receive formal professional development in supervision strategies with adults (MA QRIS, 2016).

For lead teachers, three of the states (Illinois, Minnesota, and Massachusetts) require a license or other early childhood credential. Illinois requires one teacher on site have at least an associates degree in Early Childhood or related field. Massachusetts requires a certain percentage of classrooms to have at least one bachelor's degree or higher who work all day, and Minnesota allows a variety of certifications in early childhood (eg. suchas bachelor's degree, Child Development Associate, or Montessori credential). Kentucky also does not require college credits or experience as many other states do. Two states (Kentucky and Minnesota) do have a career lattice required with training and opportunities for staff. New Mexico has various requirements and substitutions for directors, but no education or licensure requirements can be found listed for staff.

Training requirements for administrators and staff, in regard to program and professional development, are infrequent. Illinois requires administrators be trained in quality improvement planning for the long-term success of a center. Two states, Minnesota and Massachusetts require professional development plans be used in their center by administrators. In the requirements for Massachusetts, part of their professional development plan for both administrators and staff,

requires a timeline for completing the requirements for the next level of QRIS. New Mexico is the only state that requires training on their QRIS program, and it is required within three months of being hired.

These qualifications and training accompany implicit and explicit requirements for administrators. All of the requirements for administrators are explicit and they cannot attain the position without meeting those qualifications or retain the position without ongoing training. The requirements for staff are implicit on the administrator due to the fact they make hiring decisions, as well as ensuring they are providing training themselves or other training opportunities. For example, as part of the Massachusetts training requirements, the administrator is required to sign documentation discussing training completion. This is an example of an explicit administrative duty with implicit requirements to provide time and resources. Furthermore, Massachusetts requires staff are paid for planning time and that it is measured on the Program Administration Scale. However, there is no requirement or training mentioned elsewhere for this scale. This is another implicit expectation with explicit requirement of using the Program Administration Scale.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This document analysis of QRIS programs provided unique insight into the quality differences across the five states studied. The accessibility of information, level of detail, and specific requirements show a states' value (Cardno, 2018) placed on quality of early childhood education. The five states were chosen from quality groupings in the Connors and Morris (2015) study. Their groupings were based on a two-step clustering analysis of four categories: classroom structural quality, classroom process quality, program structural quality, and program process quality. The analysis was sorted into limited QRIS (Illinois), QRIS no focus (Kentucky), QRIS focus on classroom structure (Minnesota), QRIS focus on classroom process (New Mexico), and focus on structure and classroom process in licensing and QRIS (Massachusetts). Most notably, Illinois is categorized as a state with a statewide program focusing on structure and with limited aspects of quality. The following discussion will note differences between states, and the differences from their Connors and Morris (2015) grouping.

Research question one. According to the classroom practice component of pedagogical leadership, is there variability in the breadth and depth of criteria in QRIS policy based on differences of structural and process quality?

Structural quality. This includes the diversity of materials, level of staff education, and use of resources (Connors, 2016). Looking at the five states, they all require components of structural quality: environmental rating scales, cultural awareness and inclusion, curriculum, early learning guidelines, and assessment-based planning. Every state has a broad inclusion of structural quality components. When looking at staff education states have differing requirements. Illinois requires training for staff and administrators on environmental rating scales, transition strategies, and inclusion of children with special needs. Illinois also requires

staff and administrators to be trained on transition strategies, as well as using transitions as teaching opportunities. This wide array of training along with the other requirements shows a depth of structural quality expectations. New Mexico required training on inclusion of children with special needs, environmental rating scales, and children with special needs which shows a degree of depth in policy expectation. The only other state requiring training was Massachusetts on staff training on cultural inclusion.

The analysis showed a wide range between the depth of quality expectations within the five states studied. Illinois, according to Connors and Morris (2015), was expected to have limited structural requirements and limited QRIS expectations. Massachusetts was expected to have the highest level of structural quality in licensing and QRIS requirements. Massachusetts did require some professional training, but was the state that required it the least. These categorical differences could be due to the time between when Connors and Morris (2015) wrote their article and now, or a difference in what was studied. Most of the discrepancy in depth of QRIS requirements was found in staff training. The only mention of training was "teacher training" (Connors & Morris, 2015, p. 269).

Process quality. Process quality includes the type of interactions, relationships, and social processes taking place in the classroom (Connors & Morris, 2015; Pelatti et al., 2016). Only three of the states use interaction scales. Illinois and Minnesota require use of the CLASS. Illinois also requires training for administrators and staff on the scale. Massachusetts requires either the CLASS or Caregiver Interaction Scale and requires formal professional development for administrators and staff in positive and supportive interactions with children.

The breadth and depth of process quality are more noticeable for the five states studied. The three (Illinois, Minnesota, and Massachusetts) with mention of teacher child interaction

inherently have more breadth, and then the states (Kentucky and New Mexico) explicitly requiring more training have more depth. Massachusetts has the most breadth and depth in this area due to regulations and training requirements. Kentucky and New Mexico have no mention of caregiver interaction requirements, but these interactions are still taking place daily. Classrooms require teachers and children to interact, so when there is no mention of analysis or improvement for programs, what expectations are being placed on administrators in the program?

Question one comparisons. Research question one is supported by the findings in this study; there is variability in the breadth and depth of structural and process quality across states. According to the findings across states Illinois and Massachusetts have the greatest breadth and depth in requirements from required training to program rating tools. According to Connors and Morris (2015) these states fall into the best and worst classifications for statewide QRIS programs. Again, this could be due to discrepancies in data analysis or time between studies. New Mexico was expected to have a strong classroom structure focus according to Connors and Morris (2015) but lost breadth from requirements in process quality with no mention of interaction requirements. Kentucky and Minnesota had the least breadth and depth, especially when it came to requiring training of staff and administrators. Minnesota required environmental rating scales and the CLASS but required no training and Kentucky only required environmental rating scales. These states were expected to be third and fourth best when looking at process and structural quality and had the least variability. When comparing all five states, they have significant differences in the breadth and depth. The greatest difference in depth is the requirement for training.

Research question two. Are there differing explicit and implicit expectations for directors in QRIS policy across the classroom practice component of pedagogical leadership?

When looking at the five states in the sample, the only explicitly stated requirements was administrator training in different program components. One exception was in Massachusetts, they explicitly required administrators to complete paperwork showing program compliance with various requirements. For example, programs require administrators to have a professional development plan and a timeline for improvement. Administrators are expected to sign and submit that plan as evidence for that requirement.

As mentioned above, many states have explicit training requirements for administrators. Illinois explicitly states the administrator and staff be trained on all the same tools. There are also requirements for staff training, which is an implicit expectation on administrators. In some cases, such as New Mexico only requiring staff training on environmental rating scales, there is an implicit expectation for administrators to be trained in those areas as well. If a state requires only staff be trained, it would also be assumed the administrator would need training to use their pedagogical leadership skills within the program. In order to provide feedback or ensure high quality teaching environments administrators need the same training as their staff.

All the states have a requirement to use curriculum, align with early learning guidelines, and use assessment in planning. None of the states mention administrator involvement so there is an implicit expectation for the administrator to choose an appropriate curriculum, ensure appropriate use, and confirm assessments are being used to enrich planning. All of these fall under pedagogical leadership skills for the administrator to use their knowledge and training to appropriately support staff. Illinois is the only state to require the administrator be specifically trained on curriculum. No other states mention administrator training.

When looking at staff qualifications there are several training, education, and experience components required. There is no mention of the administrator's role in this area. But it is assumed the administrator will be conducting hiring in many cases. This is an implicit expectation on administrators to both know the QRIS requirements and ensure incoming staff have the necessary qualifications. This carries into professional development training. States have varying degrees of training requirements and administrators are implicitly expected to ensure completion. In some states such as New Mexico or Kentucky, it just requires training in some areas. In Massachusetts there is formal professional development required. In some states the administrator would be qualified to conduct trainings and in other states they need to fund travel to training or bring in professionals for the whole program.

Research question two is supported there are differences in implicit and explicit expectations for administrators in QRIS programs. States have varying levels of explicit requirements, mostly around training for administrators. Any other QRIS requirement for a program provides an implicit expectation on the administrator to ensure they are following the QRIS standards and supporting high quality classrooms. In order to follow standards, administrators need to understand the QRIS structure and requirements in order to achieve their desired level of quality.

Implications

The five states studied showed wide variability in requirements and showed what states valued when implementing their QRIS program. The similarities could be due to policy diffusion, where policy is spread outside the state of origin (Damanpour & Schneider, 2009). When a state makes a policy, other states have the opportunity to observe the outcomes and either adopt the same policy or make modifications. When a policy improves the state, other

states adopt the exact same or similar policy and that appears to be what happened for many QRIS requirements. For example, all the states have environmental rating scales, early learning guidelines, and require a high school diploma for lead teachers. These similarities could have come from diffusion, but the requirements beyond the scales and tools varied significantly.

Three major themes appeared during the data collection and analysis: assessment and classroom planning, education and training requirements, and administrator qualifications. All these themes relate to one another. Every state required assessment data to be included in their classroom planning. When looking more closely at the states, they do not all require training on assessment tools, curriculum, or planning tools. Data is required to be used by all professionals in these states but they are not expected to be trained on how to implement assessment or understand assessment data.

Lead teachers are required to have a high school diploma in most states as a baseline, but as the QRIS levels increase there are increased requirements of an associate's degree or higher in a certain number of classrooms. These teachers are expected to train staff in their classroom, use curriculum, and incorporate child assessment data in planning. Staff with a high school diploma likely do not have formal professional development (ie interaction techniques, assessment, and curriculum implementation) in early childhood. If they have experience, they gained it on the job from other teachers with only a high school diploma. These varied and often low levels of qualifications and training can create challenges in implementing high quality. For example, New Mexico has a specific literacy requirement with expected interactions, experiences, and materials but there is no training to accompany those requirements. This means, lead teachers are implementing this requirement with varying levels of experience or training.

Administrators also have minimal requirements for training. In center-based programs, the administrator is responsible for program operations, staff development, and QRIS compliance. All states require administrator training or credential along with a high school diploma in most states (Illinois, Kentucky, New Mexico, Minnesota, and Massachusetts). This credential is state issued, and many states have different levels of credentials. In these states, the administrator is supporting teachers and choosing program materials that are appropriate with little more training than the teachers. Every state does require administrators be trained or have an administrator credential to be in the position. This provides a baseline of quality, depending on the expectation from the state. Depending the requirements for the credential, administrators will be better or worse equipped to understand and execute QRIS policy, implicit, and explicit expectations.

Future research. Thorough analysis of individual states and their comparison to one another showed significant gaps in the expectations and resources available to childcare centers. The requirements for training is not in alignment with what is to be implemented in classrooms. Many of the training requirements appear to be internal, where the administrator gets formal training and the staff do not. If the staff are to be implementing curriculum and continuously monitoring quality, then they need to be trained. If only the administrator is trained, there is an implicit expectation that the administrator trains their staff.

There are varying qualifications for lead teachers, ranging from a high school diploma to a college degree and license, but there are many other supporting staff members in a classroom as well. In some cases lead teachers have only a high school diploma, they are implementing these quality and training other staff measures in their classroom. The lead teacher's knowledge of high quality childcare is what will be trained to other staff, who could move up to a lead

teacher in the future. If this level of knowledge is much lower than if a teacher was being trained at a College or University, for example, the quality of the program will be lowered. More studies should be done about the qualifications of lead teachers and how that impacts the quality of teaching in the classroom. These qualifications also translate into how effective training is on these QRIS required interactions and programs for teachers who have minimal early childhood training.

Limitations

The biggest limitation in this study was accessibility of information. Some states had explicit QRIS policy, others did not. Some made their supporting materials easy to access while others did not. For example, when googling for policy in Minnesota, it came up with the policy document for QRIS programs and their state supported website with other QRIS materials. Kentucky had policy and supporting documents on a state supported website but it took additional navigation around their website to find materials. Massachusetts had many materials on their website but their resources were restricted to login options for people participating and it was hard to find materials as an outside source.

When the requirements are hard to find, then programs will be less apt to comply or participate if it is a choice. Administrators have limited time to research requirements and find the materials. Even with dedicated time specifically aimed at finding policy and supporting documents there was limited information available for New Mexico and Kentucky. This could be due to lack of material or inaccessibility to the public. This impacts information available to administrators even if they have the time or know how to find the materials.

Another limitation to this study were the five states chosen. They were chosen according to the Connors and Morris (2015) study, but the states did not align with their categories and this

could have impacted the breadth and depth findings between states. This was a limited sample, but there was variation in the sample even if it differed from the categories chosen. If this study were to be done again, it would be beneficial to use more or all of the states with statewide QRIS programs.

Conclusion

A review of the literature indicated there is variability in the QRIS requirements across the five states studied. This showed differences in quality expectations across the five states. Mainly the differences were in process quality components, social interactions, and administrator and staff training and qualifications. Social interactions will take place in the classroom whether they are measured for quality or not, and the quality of these interactions is further affected by the training of the teachers. Staff qualifications and training impact the quality of any structural or process quality in the classroom. Ultimately, the administrators training and qualifications impact the classroom interactions and staff, and they will have an impact on classroom quality. These findings show the need for quality requirements and quality gaps in the current five states studied.

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Appendix A - Data Collection Tool

State: **Name of QRIS:**

Classroom Practice

Specifically Name Curriculum
- ☐ Creative Curriculum
- ☐ High Scope
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Identify Types of Learning Experiences
- ☐ Centers
- ☐ Inside/Outside
- ☐ Group Times
- ☐ DAP
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Relationship Building
- ☐
- ☐

Administrator Support for Curriculum
- ☐ Observation
- ☐ Feedback
- ☐ Coaching
- ☐

Materials and Space
- ☐ Blocks
- ☐ Quiet
- ☐ Dramatic Play
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Literacy/Library
- ☐ Motor
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Organization of Materials
- ☐ Classroom Labels
- ☐ Use of activity centers
- ☐ Open and accessible
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Flow of the Day
- ☐ Free Play
- ☐ Group Time
- ☐ Nap/Quiet Time
- ☐ Outside Time
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Training Programs
- ☐ Outside Program Training
- ☐ Hours Required Yearly
- ☐ Specific to Curriculum
- ☐
- ☐

Other Comments

State:	Name of QRIS:		
Administrator Support, Encouragement, and Responsibility: Classroom Practices			
Content	**Explicit**	**Implicit**	**Notes**

State: **Name of QRIS:**

Additional Notes

Incorporated into Licensing	**Noteworthy Changes**	**Other Comments**
☐ Yes ☐ No **Year Implemented** ☐ _____ **Type of Scoring System** ☐ Hybrid ☐ Block ☐ Point _____ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	